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WRITING AMONG THE HEBREWS.

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I. BIBLICAL STATEMENTS.

There is no direct testimony that the Hebrews were acquainted with the art of writing before the time of Moses. It was not necessary that letters should have been engraved upon the signet ring of Judah (Gen xxxviii., 18); the record in Gen. xxiii. could even be urged as an *argumentum e silentio* for the time of Abraham; and the office of the שֹׁטְרִים, of whom Exod. v., 6 seqq., speaks, does not mean precisely "scribe," but "director, overseer." Nevertheless, it is evident from the way in which mention is made of the writing of Moses,¹ and at the same time of the writing of priests² and others,³ and also of the engraving of names and other words in stone and metal,⁴ that the art of writing was then somewhat diffused among the Hebrews, and was, therefore, no new discovery. In the Book of Joshua, we may compare viii., 32 (מִשְׁנֵה תוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה, written upon stones) and xviii., 6, 8, 9 (a description of Canaan drawn up with a view to disposing of it by casting lots). Even in the times of the Judges the knowledge of writing must have been widely extended; for (Judg. viii., 14) a boy of Succoth, accidentally captured, is able to write down the names of seventy-seven princes and elders of that city (cf. 1 Sam. x., 25). Songs, such as those in Num. xxi. and Judg. v., must have been recorded at an early age (cf. also Josh. x., 13, סֵפֶר הַיָּשָׁר). Consequently the assertion of Hartmann, Vatke, and von Bohlén, that the art of writing could only have become known to the Hebrews shortly before or even after the time of Solomon, is indefensible. From the time of the kings there come to us numerous notices of the employment of writing in public as well as in private life, on the part of adults,⁵ and also of children (Isa. x., 19).

From Isa. viii., 1 (חֶרֶט אֹנִישׁ) it may be concluded that, in the time of Isaiah, beside the customary script there was a somewhat more cursive, perhaps

¹ Legal, Exod. xxiv., 4, 7; xxxiv., 27; Deut. xxxi., 9, 24; historical, Exod. xvii., 14; Num. xxxiii., 2; Song of Moses, Deut. xxxi., 22; compare also Num. xvii., 18 [E. V. 3].

² Num. v., 23.

³ Only in Deut. vi., 9; xi., 20; bill of divorcement, xxiv., 1, 3.

⁴ Exod. xxviii., 9, 36.

⁵ 2 Sam. xi., 4; 1 Kgs. xxi., 8, 11; 2 Kgs. v., 5 seqq.; x., 1; Isa. viii., 1; x., 1, 19; xxix., 11 seq.; xxx., 8; xxxvii., 14; xxxix., 1; Jer. xxix., 1; Hos. viii., 12; Hab. ii., 2; Ps. xlv., 2; 2 Chron. ii., 10; xxi., 12; bill of purchase, Jer. xxxii., 10; judicial procedure, Job xlii., 26; xxxi., 35; the State Secretary, סֹפֵר, 2 Sam. viii., 17; xx., 25; 1 Kgs. iv., 3; 2 Kgs. xii., 11; xix., 2; xxii., 3; the king's annalist, כְּתִיבִי.

smaller, script, which could be read only by the more learned. According to many 'ח' denotes the ancient Hebrew writing in contradistinction to that which came into Palestine with the Aramaic language,¹ the latter being then indeed very similar to the former, but nevertheless already so different as not to be generally readable.

Ezra iv., 7 (כְּתוּב אֲרָמִית) shows that the Hebrew script differed from the Aramaic at least in the time of Artaxerxes.

We must take it that paper (χάρτης 2 John, 12) was the material upon which persons ordinarily wrote. To be sure, this is not expressly affirmed in the Old Testament, but there is just as little indication in it that they used the prepared skins of beasts, though this is a common assumption. For the LXX. have rightly translated Jer. xxxvi. (Sept. xliii.) χαρτίον and χάρτης;² and as for Num. v., 23, we should take into account that fresh writing in ink can be washed from papyrus also. Papyrus grows abundantly in Palestine even now; for example, beside the sea of Huleh, in the plain of Gennesaret, and beside the Jordan in the vicinity of Jacob's Bridge. Parchment, discovered much later, is mentioned only in the New Testament (2 Tim. iv., 13, τὰς μεμβράνας).

The books were in the form of rolls (מְגִלָּה Jer. xxxvi.; Ezek. ii., 9; iii., 1 seqq.; Ps. xl., 8; Zech. v., 1, 2).

They wrote with a reed,³ cut to a point with the scribe's knife,⁴ and with ink.⁵ The writing utensils were carried in a girdle (Ezek. as cited above). For engraving on metal or stone, eventually also for carving in wood, an iron style⁶ was employed; because of a similar use the חֲרֹט (Isa. viii., 1) had its name (חָרַט, to carve, engrave.)

Beside the literature hereafter cited, we may name: E. A. Steglich, *Skizzen ueber Schrift- und Buechewesen der Hebräer zur Zeit des alten Bundes*, Leipzig, 1876, 4to, pp. 16.

II. HISTORY OF THE HEBREW SCRIPT.

A. The history of writing among the Hebrews is closely connected with that of writing in general, especially Semitic.

The ancient Semitic alphabet was not, indeed, originated by the Hebrews. The names of the letters are not pure Hebrew, neither is there any tradition or legend respecting it. The honor belongs to "a people speaking Canaanite and in intimate intercourse with the Egyptians;"⁷ the Hyksos or Shepherd Kings

¹ Isa. xxxvi., 11.

² "Despite his violent anger the king would not have thrown whole pieces of leather upon the open oriental fire-pan."—Schlottmann.

³ עֶט, Ps. xlv., 2; Jer. viii., 8; κάλαμος, 3 John 13.

⁴ תַּעַר הַסֵּפֶר, Jer. xxxvi., 23.

⁵ דִּיּוֹ, Jer. xxxvi., 18; μέλαν, 2 Cor. iii., 3; 2 John, 12; 3 John, 13; inkstand, קִשְׁתַּת הַסֵּפֶר, Ezek. ix., 2, 3, 11.

⁶ פְּרִיץ, Jer. xvii., 1; Job xix., 24.

⁷ Schlottmann, p. 1430b.

have been suggested. The inventor was certainly acquainted with the hieroglyphs; but, despite their exterior similarity, it is very doubtful whether the Egyptian and the Semitic signs are identical, and the latter, therefore, derived [from the former].

In the Semitic script the principle of acrophony rules; that is, each letter is represented by the picture of an object whose name begins with the letter under consideration: for example, the letter *d* by Δ , the outline of a tent-door, dalth, deleth, dāleth. It is to be further noted, that all the letters are in the first place only consonants. Probably there were not twenty-two letters at the beginning: it is quite possible that \aleph , \beth , \daleth , \wreath were developed later from \aleph , \aleph , \aleph , \wreath , through differentiation, and each of these last four represented two related sounds, as did γ also later, similar to the Arabic ϵ and ϵ . At least the meaning of the names of \aleph , \beth , \daleth , is entirely unknown; and \aleph and \wreath break into related groups of letters.¹ The order of the letters is shown to be very old by the alphabetical Psalms (ix. seq., xxv., xxxiv., xxxvii., cxl., cxli., cxlv.), by Prov. xxxi., 10–31, and by Lam. i.–iv., and still more certainly by the ancient Greek alphabet. It has no fundamental plan of arrangement; yet an intentional classification is evident in several places.

In the north-Semitic group of languages, if we except the Assyro-Babylonian cuneiform literature, a Western and an Eastern, or a Canaanitic and an Aramaic, development are to be distinguished. The same is true as to the characters used in writing.²

B. The oldest known witness, at present, to the development of the north-Semitic script is the thirty-four line inscription of Mesha', king of Moab, found in the year 1868, by the German minister, F. H. Klein, among the ruins of Dibon (Dhibân). It is of the ninth century before Christ (cf. 2 Kgs. iii., 4 seq.). Concerning this inscription of which fragments, unfortunately incomplete, are now in the Louvre in Paris, see in particular: Th. Nöldeke, *Die Inschrift des Königs Mesa von Moab erklärt*, Kiel, 1870, page 38.; Const. Schlottman, *Die Siegestsäule Mesa's*, Halle, 1870, 51 pp.; *ZDMG.*, xxiv. (1870), page 253 seq., 483 seq., 645 seq.; xxv. (1871), page 463 seq.; L. Diestel, in the *Jahrb. f. Deutsche Theologie*, 1871, page 215 seq.

Closely related are the characters of the Siloam inscription, discovered in June, 1880, and belonging probably to the time of Hezekiah. Cf. especially, A. Socin, *Zeitschr. d. Deutschen Palästina-Vereins*, iii. (1880), page 54 seq.; E. Kautzsch, *ZDPV.* iv., pages 102–114, 260–271 (with a lithograph); v., pages 205–218; H. Huthe, *ZDPV.* iv., 250–259; *ZDMG.* xxxvi. (1882), pages 725–750 (with a sun-print plate).

¹ Schlottmann is inclined also to strike \aleph and \beth from the oldest alphabet.

² The attempt made by W. Deecke (*ZDMG.* xxxi. 107 seq.), to derive the ancient Semitic alphabet from the later Assyrian cuneiform writing, has not found anywhere a lasting endorsement.

Twenty seals with ancient Hebrew inscriptions belong probably to the period from the eighth to the seventh century B. C. See particularly M. A. Levy, *Siegel und Gemmen mit aramäischen, phönizischen, althebr., himjar. . . . Inschriften*, l. c., 1869, pp. 55, plates 3.

Here we should place the Phœnician inscriptions, concerning which we are now receiving continuous disclosures, in a style worthy imitation, through the Paris *Corpus inscriptionum Semiticarum ab Academia inscriptionum et litterarum humaniorum conditum atque digestum. Pars prima inscriptiones Phœnicias continens*, of which the first two numbers (Tom. i., fasc. 1, 2), have appeared (1881 and 1883). The epitaph of Eshmun'azar is to be especially noted in this connection. It is certainly of the first half of the fourth century B. C.: C. Schlottmann, *Die Inschrift Eschmunazars, Königs der Sidonier*, Halle, 1868, pp. 202, plates 3; C. J. Kämpf, *Phönizische Epigraphik. Die Grabschrift Eschmunazar's, Königs der Sidonier. Urtext und Uebersetzung*, Prag, 1874, pp. 83.

Essentially the same script is on all Hebrew coins, of which we have not a few, perhaps from the time of Simon Maccabæus (143-135),¹ safely from John Hyrcanus I. (135-105),² down to the time of Bar Cochba. Cf. especially Fred. W. Madden, *Coins of the Jews* (second volume of *The International Numismata Orientalia*), London, 1881, pp. xi, 329, large 4to, 279 wood-cuts and 1 plate.

This script was the one exclusively used by the Jews up to the time of Ezra. Then, as will hereafter be shown, it was gradually exchanged for (displaced by) the Aramaic.

The Semitic writing is "a younger, calligraphic remodeling of the ancient Hebrew" (Stade, *Hebr. Grammatik*, page 26). Several specimens of writing may be found in Rosen's essay: "Alte Handschriften des samaritanischen Pentateuch," *ZDMG.*, XVIII. (1864) pages 582-589.

From the foregoing account, we have purposely omitted the portions of an epitomized compilation of Deuteronomy brought to Europe in 1883 by the Jerusalem book-dealer W. M. Schapira. These are written, it is true, with letters very similar to those of the Moabite stone; but, as the writer of this article, who first saw the entire thing, said to the owner, it is an altogether modern production. The appearance of age has been skillfully given it by using the blank upper and lower edges of leather synagogue rolls as material for writing upon. Cf. my letter of August 31, addressed to the publisher of the *Times* (in the number for Sept. 4, 1883); my notice of Guthe's publication, named below, in *Theol. Lit.-Blatt*, No. 40; Franz Delitzsch's article, "Schapira's Pseudo-Deuteronomium," in the *Allgem. Ev.-Luther-Kirchenzeitung*, Nos. 36-39; H. Guthe, *Fragmente einer Lederhandschrift, enthaltend Mose's letzte Rede an die Kinder Israel, mitgetheilt und geprüft*, Leipzig, 1883, pp. 94. In view of the fact that the pieces of skin (some

¹ Madden, p. 61 seqq.

² de Saulcy, Ewald, Derenbourg.

years since declared a forgery, by C. Schlottmann, upon the ground of communications made in correspondence by Schapira) and the "Moabitica"¹ were brought to Europe by the same dealer, we may refer merely to the most important literature respecting the latter. Const. Schlottmann, *ZDMG.*, vols. 26-28; H. Weser, *ib.* vols. 26, 28; Ad. Koch, *Moabitisch oder Selimisch?* Stuttgart, 1876, pp. 98; E. Kautzsch and A. Socin, *Die Aechtheit der Moabitischen Alterthümer geprüft*, Strassburg, 1876. pp. 191.

C. The oldest authenticated documents in respect of the Eastern or Aramaic development of the north-Semitic writing, are the old Aramaic seal inscriptions, which differ but a little from the ancient Hebrew. The main point in these gradual changes can be stated thus: Opening of the closed heads (כ, ד, ר, later also ע), rounding of the angular forms.

The development proceeds very well, if we shall arrange the material at hand for critical examination in the following manner: The Assyrian clay tablets with conventions in the cuneiform character and Aramaic letters. The papyrus written by Aramæans in Egypt during the Persian domination, upon which final letters for כ, ל, נ are already distinguished. The Cilician coins of the fourth century [B. C.]. The stone of Carpentras (in the department of Vaucluse). The Nabatæan and the Palmyrene inscriptions. The inscription of 'Arâq el-Emîr (half-way between Rabbath Ammon and Jericho), probably soon after 176 B. C. The inscription of the priestly family, the בְּנֵי חֲזִיר, on "the Tomb of St. James" (Valley of Kidron), presumably of the first century B. C. The word of Christ (Matt. v., 18), ἵστα ἐν ἡ μία κεφαλή οὐ μὴ παρέλθῃ ἀπὸ τοῦ νόμου, has reference, doubtless, not to the ancient Hebrew characters, but to those of the Eastern development. The Kefr Bir'im inscriptions (seven and a half miles NNW. from Safed) which, according to Renan,² belong to the end of the second or the beginning of the third century after Christ, while Levy and Schlottmann maintain that they are older.

Out of this style of writing with its many ligatures, by the isolation of the letters and a tendency to calligraphy, the square character (כְּתָב מְרֻבֵּעַ) has arisen.

D. The adoption of the Aramaic script on the part of the Jews, did not occur all at once, but by degrees. The oldest witness which attests the entrance of this script into Palestine, is the 'Arâq el-Emîr inscription, consisting, unfortunately, of only five letters, טוּבִיה: it has the ancient Hebrew Yodh. The later inscription on the so-called "Tomb of St. James," already mentioned, shows only the Aramaic type of writing. Though all Hebrew coins, even those of Bar Cochba, have legends in the ancient Hebrew script, yet we may hardly hold that this is the act of a cultured patriotism which had knowledge of the old national script that had become obsolete, but we must conclude that the ancient script was then

¹ [The Berlin "Moabitica;" to be distinguished, of course, from the Moabite stone. Tr.].

² *Journal Asiat.*, 1864, Vol. IV., p. 531 seqq.; 1865, Vol. VI., p. 561 seqq.

quite generally known; for what is illegible can hardly command the patriotism of the ordinary man, and beside this the writing upon the coins was essentially that of the Samaritans whom the Jews so hated. The knowledge, nay more, the use, of the ancient script follows from the Mishna *Yadayim* iv., 5. Here also are to be noted two statements of Origen by way of citation which can scarcely be assigned to a later period. According to Montfaucon, *Hexaplorum Origenis quæ supersunt*, i., 86, he says that the Greeks use κύριος for the unpronounceable divine name, and then he continues: καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἀκριβέσι τῶν ἀντιγράφων Ἑβραϊκοῖς γράμμασι, ἀλλ' οὐχὶ τοῖς νῦν φασὶ γὰρ τὸν Ἑσδραν ἐτέροις χρήσασθαι μετὰ τὴν αἰχμαλωσίαν. And in respect to Ezek. ix., 4 (Montf. ii., 282) he says that a baptized Jew told him: τὰ ἀρχαῖα στοιχεῖα ἐμπερὲς ἔχειν τὸ θαῦ τῷ τοῦ σταυροῦ χαρακτήρι. There is no indication whatever that the ancient script has been used by the Jews since the second century of the Christian era.

How is this complete disappearance to be explained? Only upon the hypothesis that earlier than this the Aramaic script (the square character) had come to be considered sacred, the ancient Hebrew profane. Even in the above-cited Mishna, it stands as an incontrovertible dogma that the Hebrew manuscripts of the Bible were only to be deemed sacred in case they were written in the square script (אשורית) with ink upon leather (עור), but not if the (ancient) Hebrew writing (כתב עברי) were employed. Whence the sacredness of this script? The view that Ezra brought the square writing with him from Assyria out of the exile—a view attested so early as the second century after Christ (Rabbi Jose, Rabbi Nathan)—is significant in this connection.¹ Even if Ezra did not bring the Aramaic script with him (it came without him, along with the Aramaic language), it is nevertheless most probable that he caused the Aramaic writing to be used in the numerous copies of the law which were made at his procurement. Inasmuch as the letters of the law came more and more to be regarded as divine, and the difference between the two types of writing constantly increased, at a later period such a change in the script would not have been possible.

E. From various statements in the Talmud (e. g., *Sabbath*, 103, 104), we perceive first, that the square writing employed in its time had long since attained a defined form, and second, that the character found in manuscripts and imprints corresponds with it.² This stability is explained by the peculiar respect entertained for the law, which was written with these letters.³ There is a diversity in the characters employed in the manuscripts of the Bible, but one that in no way makes against the correspondence just spoken of. By this diversity we are enabled to determine, often with certainty, as to the nationality of respective

¹ Jerusalem Talmud, *Megilla* i., 11 (Shitomir's edition, i., 9), fol. 71, col. b, l. 56 seqq.; Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin*, 21, col. b.

² Cf. A. Berliner, *Beiträge zur hebr. Grammatik im Talmud und Midrasch*, Berlin, 1879, pp. 15–26.

³ Cf. my article "Massora," *PRE.* ix., 389, and the bibliography given therein, Remark 2.

manuscripts or of their transcribers; e. g., it is very easy to distinguish between Spanish and German codices of the Bible. To a far less extent are we able, from the characters used, to speak with assurance respecting the age of a manuscript; many statements in catalogues purporting to be absolute are purely suggestive, and may be in great measure incapable of proof.

As old witnesses regarding the state of the square script in the earlier centuries [of the Christian era], we may here name: the ten tomb inscriptions in Venosa, Lavello and Brindisi—of the first half of the ninth century—published by G. J. Ascoli;¹ and the codex of the prophets with the Babylonian punctuation—of the year 916.²

On the contrary we are not to take into account: first, the epitaph of the Mashta found in Aden; for, to the date “29 Seleuc.,” we have to restore not only the order of thousands, but of hundreds also (1029 Seleuc. = 717 A. D.);³ second, very many “finds” of the Karaite, Abr. Firkowitsch, who died at Tschufutkale in the Crimea, 1874, viz., all epigraphs which are said to have been written earlier than the year 916, and almost, if not quite, all epitaphs which now bear date as of the fifth or even the fourth millenary, Jewish chronology (therefore before 1240 or even 240 after Christ). The epitaphs are collected in the ספר אנכי זכרון, published by A. Firkowitsch (Wilna, 1872). D. Chwolson has especially maintained the genuineness of the Firkowitsch finds.⁴ Cf. on the contrary, what the writer has observed concerning the numerous forgeries of Firkowitsch (also touching upon the history of the punctuation and the Massora) in *A. Firkowitsch und seine Entdeckungen. Ein Grabstein den hebr. Grabschriften der Krim*, Leipzig, 1876, pp. 44; *Theol. Litztg.*, 1878, No. 25, col. 619 seq.; *Die Dikduke ha-teamim des Ahron ben Moscheh ben Ascher*, Leipzig, 1879, Introduction; *ZDMG.* xxxiv. (1880), pages 163–168; *Lit. Centralblatt*, 1883, No. 25, cols. 878–880.

Concerning the peculiar embellishments of numerous letters, the so-called תגין or כתרים, cf. Talmud, *Menachoth*, 29, cols. a, b; *Sabbath*, 89, col. a; 105, col. b; ספר תגין, *Sepher Taghin, Liber coronularum* . . . edidit . . . J. J. L. Barges, Paris, 1886, pp. xxxi, 42, 55, 16mo.; J. Derenbourg, *Journal Asiatique*, 1867, Vol. IX., pages 242–251.

The literature relating to the punctuation I have given in the article “*Mas-sora*,” [PRE.2] Vol. IX., page 390, Rem. 2, and page 393, Rem. 3.

¹ *Iscrizioni inedite o mal note, greche, latine, ebraische, di antichi sepolcri giudaici del Napolitano, edite e illustrate*, Turin and Rome, 1880, pp. 120, 8 sun-print plates.

² *Prophetarum posteriorum codex Babylonicus Petropolitanus* . . . edidit Hermannus Strack, St. Petersburg and Leipzig, 1876.

³ Against Levy, Stade, Schlottman, and others.

⁴ *Achtzehn hebraeische Grabschriften aus der Krim*, St. Petersburg, 1865, pp. 135, large 4to, 9 plates; and *Corpus inscriptionum Hebraicarum* (1882) [Title given in Bibliography]. Although the author in the second work concedes that Firkowitsch has forged much, still his point of view is wholly uncritical; and the invectives and charges vociferated against the undersigned do not conceal this from the learned.

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Copies of Hebrew epitaphs: Firkowitzsch in אבני זכרון (imperfect); Chwolson in both his works already named; Ascoli, as cited above; The Paleographical Society, etc., Part II., fol. 29, Epitaph of the Mashta, ostensibly of the year 717-8, in reality later (see above). The practiced hand of Prof. Jul. Euting has given a detailed graphical exposition of the history of the Hebrew alphabet three times, in *Outlines of Hebrew Grammar*, by G. Bickell (translated by S. I. Curtiss), Leipzig, 1877; *The Hebrew Alphabet*, *The Paleogr. Soc.*, Part VII., London, 1882; Chwolson, *Corpus etc.*

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¹ The editors are disposed to hold that the codices used for folios 40 and 54 were written in the twelfth century. It is doubtful whether this is correct.

pp. 358, 398 (1st, Semitic Alphabets; 2d, Aryan Alphabets), particularly Vol. I., pages 268–283; A. Kirchhoff, *Studien zur Gesch. des griech. Alphabets*, 3d edition, Berlin, 1877, pp. 168 with illustrations.

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Leopold Löwe, *Graphische Requisiten und Erzeugnisse bei den Juden*, 2 parts, Leipzig, 1870, 1871 (alternate title: *Beiträge zur juedischen Alterthumskunde*, Vol. I.), pp. 243, 190. Contents: Material upon which they wrote; Materials and utensils for writing; Scribe; Records.—Noteworthy because of its careful use of the Jewish literature. For the names of the ancient Hebrew script compare moreover, the essay, כתב ליבנאה and כתב דעץ, by Georg Hoffmann, *Ztschr. fuer die alttest. Wissensch.*, 1881, pages p. 334–338.